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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8712
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001772

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/19/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [GG](#) [UP](#) [MD](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: U/S BURNS'S MEETING WITH DFM KARASIN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

11. (C) Summary. Prior to the CTWG Core Group consultations, on June 19, U/S Burns met with Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin and covered Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh. Karasin described to U/S Burns Russia's reaction to the increasing distance between Russia and Ukraine and expressed hope for a Ukraine able to maintain good relations with both Russia and the West. U/S Burns urged Russian restraint in Abkhazia, while Karasin put the onus for an improvement there on Saakashvili. Karasin hoped the USG would ease sanctions against Belarus. DAS Merkel noted the need for Belarus to allow the U.S. Embassy to return to normal and to free political prisoners. Karasin was cautiously optimistic about progress over Nagorno - Karabakh, terming the Aliyev - Sarkisyan meeting at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum "not bad." End summary.

12. (C) In a June 19 meeting, U/S Burns and Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin discussed Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh. DFM Karasin expounded his view that, in the 21st century, international problems defy a simple solution. Unfortunately, leaders of new young democracies were in search of rapid solutions that did not require a concerted, protracted effort. The U.S., Russia, and other global leaders must remain in close contact in order to help guide more inexperienced players. U/S Burns recalled Karasin's visit to Washington 18 months ago and invited him back. Karasin suggested consultations in Washington close to the end of the year.

Ukraine

13. (C) Karasin thought that NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer's just-completed visit to Ukraine had yielded no surprises, and the situation on the ground remained unchanged. The majority of Ukrainians continue to oppose Ukraine's entry into NATO, but "the picture is messy." NATO membership -- a choice with enormous strategic implications -- continued to widen divisions within the country and could catalyze early elections. At the same time, Russia and Ukraine, which share a common history, are moving further and further away from their traditionally close ties. Karasin reiterated that stability in Ukraine was of paramount importance to Russia. The GOR hoped for a Ukrainian government friendly to Russia, to the U.S, and the EU. At the same time, the GOR had to take into account an emotional response by the Russian people to events inside Ukraine. U/S Burns emphasized that stability in Ukraine and a healthy relationship between Moscow and Kiev were likewise important for the U.S. The decision to seek NATO membership was for sovereign Ukraine alone to make, but the NATO MAP process was careful, measured, and transparent.

14. (C) U/S Burns expressed concern about the recent escalation in rhetoric vis-a-vis Ukraine and urged a more low-key approach. Karasin likened the current situation to close relatives who had shared one communal apartment but

were now scattered among several while memories of their shared "time together" remained fresh. He defended Moscow Mayor Luzhkov who, in a May 12 speech, had claimed Russia's right to the naval base in Sevastopol. Luzhkov was responding to a large crowd chanting "Sevastopol! Crimea! Russia!" during the ceremony marking the 225th anniversary of the base. Karasin, who had accompanied Luzhkov on May 12 and DPM Sergey Ivanov on June 14 to Sevastopol, had witnessed the fervor of the community first hand. He agreed that respect, calm, and predictability should prevail, but argued that the Black Sea Fleet was "at home" in Sevastopol. Karasin warned that a NATO MAP offer for Ukraine would change everything in the Russian approach to the 1997 bilateral agreement on the Black Sea Fleet.

15. (C) Karasin affirmed that bilateral relations with Ukraine were continuing to develop, but the complicated relationship between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko made the work of the Intergovernmental Commission difficult.

Georgia

16. (C) U/S Burns reminded Karasin that the U.S. had made a steady effort to have the GOG exercise restraint and engage Abkhazia directly. In light of the Georgians' unilateral discontinuation of UAV flights and reduced security forces in Kodori, the GOR should withdraw its military railroad construction battalion as soon as possible. U/S Burns also recommended that the GOR consult with the Georgians in advance of any new initiatives. Karasin predicted that the battalion would depart Abkhazia about August 10. He stressed that Saakashvili must understand that the process of conflict resolution started with him, not with Washington, Moscow or the Friends. Karasin argued that the GOG had launched an all out diplomatic offensive against Russia on a global scale, including in New York and Vienna. Now the new theme was the CIS PKO, he said. Karasin warned that no amount of drawn out legal analysis could produce constructive results until the Georgians accepted Abkhazia as a partner to the 1994 Agreement. In the case of the CIS PKO, the Georgians pretended not to understand that the Abkhaz were afraid of the Georgians and that UNOMIG could not stay without a CIS mandate.

17. (C) Karasin praised Alasania's visit to Abkhazia. The first step should be to sign an agreement not to resort to force and to normalize the situation in Kodori. That would set the stage for further constructive steps, said Karasin. Karasin briefed on his discussion with visiting German Coordinator the Friends' Group Hans-Dieter Lucas earlier the same day, adding that the Russia would participate in the June 30 Friends' meeting in Berlin. (CIS Fourth Department Director Andrey Kelin will represent the GOR.) One danger, Karasin warned, was Saakashvili's mistaken belief that the settlement would be arranged for him by the Friends. U/S Burns countered, maintaining that the German three-step proposal and a Georgia - Abkhazia dialogue were not mutually exclusive. Both tracks should be pursued. In response to U/S Burns's repeated questions on the areas where Russia could take positive steps, Karasin replied only that the GOG must create the appropriate circumstances by reducing its forces in Kodori.

18. (C) Karasin insisted that instead of criticizing the April 16 Presidential instructions to strengthen social, economic and consular ties, Georgia should join in. Abkhaz aspirations had been heightened by Kosovo's declaration of independence. A "delicate" issue remained IDP return, because the Abkhaz worried it could jeopardize their survival as a people. U/S Burns suggested that, instead of waiting for the Georgians to make the first move, Russia could move unilaterally to reduce tensions. Karasin noted that the June 18 phone conversation between Medvedev and Saakashvili, had resulted in DFM Vashadze's June 23 Moscow visit. He, however, insisted that the Georgian leadership should muster the political courage to sign the non-use of force agreement and normalize the situation in Kodori. Georgia's gesture

would not only increase trust among the Abkhaz but allow the GOG to challenge the Abkhazians with "We have done it, how about you?" "Bargaining," long arguments, and political rhetoric have led the Georgians nowhere.

Belarus

¶9. (C) Karasin said that Lukashenko had launched reforms and advised the U.S. to ease sanctions against Belarus, particularly Belneftkhim. U/S Burns said that the USG planned no significant changes in its policies at this time. DAS Merkel added that the re-establishment of a normal embassy, the freeing of political prisoners, including opposition leader Kozulin, and good cooperation with the OSCE could help.

Moldova

¶10. (C) In response to U/S Burns's request for information on Security Council Deputy Secretary Zubakov's June 18-21 visit to Tiraspol and Chisinau, Karasin said that the preliminary report over the phone had been positive. He also previewed the Moldovan Prime Minister's June 20 visit to Moscow for meetings with Prime Minister Putin. Karasin indicated that not much movement had taken place since the April Voronin-Smirnov meeting. Plans for a meeting between their representatives were in place, however.

Nagorno-Karabakh

¶11. (C) Karasin observed that the flurry of unhelpful behavior by the Azerbaijan government that followed Kosovo's independence had subsided. The Aliyev - Sarkisyan meeting at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum had been "not bad." The two determining factors remained the internal situation in Armenia and the level of political patience in a dynamic and oil-flush Azerbaijan, where certain political factions supported a military solution. Fortunately, Aliyev understood the danger of precipitous military action, said Karasin.
RUSSELL